

# The Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah Revisited

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Since the long and halting process of the recovery of Theodore Abū Qurrah's works began, there have been numerous attempts to reconstruct a coherent account of his life. These reconstructions disagree on many details. Nor is this surprising. The evidence available is sparse. It is often tendentious. It is even more often reticent to provide data for the main concerns of modern researchers. Notwithstanding that consensus has yet to be reached on the details of Abū Qurrah's life, there are some points on which all agree. They are confident that he lived in the late eighth and early ninth centuries A.D. They are unanimous that he was, for a time, the bishop of Ḥarrān. Similarly, all agree that Abū Qurrah was intricately linked to the monastery of Mar Sabas—indeed, that Abū Qurrah was himself a monk at that monastery. When he spent his time there is a point on which there is debate. Similarly, it is unclear whether he spent more than one stint there as a monk. What is important to recognize is that there is unanimous consent that Abū Qurrah spent at least part of his life at the monastery of Mar Sabas. This has been, for instance, the conclusion of Ignace Dick, Georg Graf, Sidney H. Griffith, Joseph Nasrallah, and Khalil Samir.<sup>1</sup>

The proposition that Abū Qurrah was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas has not been without profound implications for the direction that research on his writings has taken. Abū Qurrah is important. He was one of the first Christians to write in Arabic. He was a significant figure in the intellectual history of the iconoclast controversy, especially in its non-Byzantine form. Indeed, he was himself the author of an articulate defense of icons. Perhaps most importantly, his works were extremely innovative in not a few regards: not least their attempt to articulate a new vision of Christian identity using the language and conceptual tools of Muslim theologians. And yet, as researchers have long recognized, Abū Qurrah did not exist in an intellectual vacuum. He was heir to a long tradition of theological reflection. Researchers have given, accordingly, much attention to the task of contextualizing Abū Qurrah's labors. And one of the most constant streams of reflection in this regard is that Abū Qurrah's efforts are best seen against the backdrop of the monastery of

<sup>1</sup> I. Dick, "Un continuateur arabe de saint Jean Damascène: Théodore Abuqurra, évêque melkite de Har-ran" (pt. 3), *PrOC* 13 (1963): 122–23; G. Graf, *Geschichte der christlichen arabischen Literatur*, vol. 2 (Vatican City, 1947), 8; S. H. Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah: The Intellectual Profile of an Arab Christian Writer of the First Abbasid Century* (Tel Aviv, 1992), 18–20, cf. his "Reflections on the Biography of Theodore Abū Qurrah," *Parole de l'Orient* 18 (1993): 150–52; J. Nasrallah, *Histoire du mouvement littéraire dans l'Église melchite du Ve au XXe siècle*, vol. 2.2 (Louvain, 1988), 111; Kh. Samir, "al-Jadid fī Sīrat Thāwudūrus Abī Qurrah wa-Āthārihi," *al-Mashriq* 73 (1999): 418–19.

Mar Sabas. The contextualization of Abū Qurrah's labors is an important project, one that deserves much further research, but this is not a concern here. Instead, I would like to re-examine the proposition that Abū Qurrah was a Sabaite monk. On what evidence is this proposition based, and is that evidence reliable?

#### EXTERNAL EVIDENCE: THE PASSION OF MICHAEL THE SABAITE

The primary evidence for Abū Qurrah having been a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas is the Passion of Michael the Sabaite. Not only is this text the only piece of external evidence to suggest that Abū Qurrah was a Sabaite monk, it is also the only text explicitly to identify him as such. It is, thus, doubly unfortunate that we do not have access to the original version of this text. The Passion is preserved today, instead, in a Georgian translation.<sup>2</sup> This translation was, it seems, produced in one of the Palestinian monasteries, perhaps in the tenth century.<sup>3</sup> As for the language from which it was translated, it is generally regarded as having been Arabic.<sup>4</sup> And it would seem that this Arabic version of the Passion was itself produced at the monastery of Mar Sabas.<sup>5</sup>

The narrator of the Passion is said to be a priest from the monastery of Mar Sabas—otherwise unknown—named Basil, “an amazing man and a seer of wonders” (§1). On the day of the Annunciation, we are told, Basil and some of the brethren were engaged in a procession outside the monastery. On their way back, they stopped at the cell of “the famous Abba Theodore Abū Qurrah.” After taking food and drink, the monks were told a story by Abū Qurrah. It concerned events that took place in the days of the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (685–705), when the caliph and his wife had come up from Babylon to Jerusalem (§2). The reason for this journey was, we are told, to ask about and search for “a Christian man knowledgeable about the law.”

According to Abū Qurrah, at the time of ‘Abd al-Malik's visit to Jerusalem there were in the monastery of Mar Sabas two famous monks, both from Tiberias: Abba Moses and his disciple Michael (§3). The latter went one day to Jerusalem to sell boxes and baskets. There he encountered a eunuch who was a servant of the caliph's wife. This eunuch took the young monk to his mistress, who promptly fell in love with him (§4). When the monk rebuffed her advances, she had him arrested and brought before her husband (§5). There ensued a theological debate among the caliph, a Jew, and the monk—with Michael, not sur-

<sup>2</sup> The only edition is that of K. Kekelidze, published in his *Monumenta Hagiographica Georgica, Pars Prima: Keimena*, vol. 1 (Tbilisi, 1918), 165–73. Cf. also his “რომანი «აბუკურა» და მისი ორი რედაქცია ძველ ქართულ მწერლობაში” (“The Romance of Abū Qurrah and Its Two Redactions in Old Georgian Literature”), in his ეტიუდები ძველი ქართული ლიტერატურის ისტორიიდან (*Studies in Old Georgian Literature*), vol. 6 (Tbilisi, 1960), 18–40. P. Peeters has produced a Latin translation of the Passion: “La passion de S. Michel le Sabaïte,” *AB* 48 (1930): 65–98, translation at 66–77. A new version in English has recently been prepared by M. J. Blanchard: “The Georgian Version of the Martyrdom of Saint Michael, Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery,” *ARAM* 6 (1994): 149–63. Unless otherwise stated, in what follows I cite from Blanchard's translation.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the evidence, see S. H. Griffith, “Michael, the Martyr and Monk of Mar Sabas Monastery, at the Court of the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik: Christian Apologetics and Martyrology in the Early Islamic Period,” *ARAM* 6 (1994): 120–23.

<sup>4</sup> See Peeters, “Michel le Sabaïte,” 65–66, and the evidence cited in the notes to his translation, as well as the excellent analysis of Blanchard, “Martyrdom of Saint Michael,” 159–63.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the evidence, see Griffith, “Michael, the Martyr and Monk,” 121, 129–30.

prisingly, the winner (§6–9). The debate was followed by a trial by poison, which Michael passed (§10). Flustered, the caliph ordered that the monk be led out of the city, where he was beheaded (§11).

The Sabaite monks, Abū Qurrah continues, received Michael's body and took it back to the monastery, accompanied by a fiery cloud, like a pillar of light, which traveled with the holy martyr and could be seen by all the citizens of Jerusalem (§12). When Michael's body was at last arrived at the monastery, an invalid monk by the name of Theodore was cured after invoking the new martyr (§13). Michael's body was then interred in "the tomb of the martyrs, the fathers, and the burned martyrs." As for Abba Moses, he prayed Michael to take him away in seven days, which prayer the martyr answered. Abū Qurrah, who is said by Basil to have presented himself as an eyewitness to these events, concludes his narrative: "And on the seventh day we preserved the teacher with the disciple. And all of us of one accord gave glory to God the Worker of wonders, to our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Such is the tale that Abū Qurrah is said to have told Basil and his fellow monks. It is followed in the *Passion* by Basil's own panegyric on the holy Sabas (§14–15), "who made the waterless desert like a celebrated city" and "discovered such disciples as Stephen and John and Thomas and Theodore Abū Qurrah." Stephen of Mar Sabas (d. 794) and John the Hesychast (d. 554) are well known. This Thomas appears to be otherwise unattested.<sup>6</sup> As for Abū Qurrah, in his panegyric Basil refers to him as "the new one of Saint Saba, the shepherd and priest-leader of Assyria, the miracle worker of Babylon" (ახალნერგი საბაწმიდისა მწყემსი და მღვდელ-მოდღუარი ასურეთისა სასწაულთა-მოქმედი ბაბილონისა).<sup>7</sup> Such is the translation of Monica Blanchard.<sup>8</sup> P. Peeters translates this key phrase: "Abucura Sancti Sabae neophytus, pastor et hierarcha Assyriae, atque Babyloniae thaumaturgus."<sup>9</sup> Neither translation strikes me as entirely satisfactory. The phrase might better be translated: "the newest scion [lit. new shoot] of Saint Sabas, shepherd and high priest of Syria,<sup>10</sup> wonderworker of Babylon." In short, Abū Qurrah is praised by Basil as the most recent of the four above-mentioned saints produced by the monastery of Mar Sabas, while at the same time he is identified as a high priest (i.e., bishop) in Syria and as someone who did miracles in Babylon.

<sup>6</sup> Basil's panegyric further describes him (§15): "And [there was] Thomas who furnished teachings for the lavra, and he used to ponder the mystery of the monks. And from Saint Saba to Jericho he gave safe custody to a disciple." Peeters ("Michel le Sabaïte," 81) referred to him as one "qui n'est autrement connu." Griffith ("Michael, the Martyr and Monk," 128–29) thinks that he might be identified with Thomas the patriarch of Jerusalem (807–821), at one time a Sabaite monk.

<sup>7</sup> Kekelidze, ed., 173.13–14.

<sup>8</sup> Blanchard, "Martyrdom of Saint Michael," 158.

<sup>9</sup> Peeters, "Michel le Sabaïte," 77.

<sup>10</sup> That ასურეთი can mean Syria is clear from numerous sources. See, e.g., the Georgian version of the *Life of Maximos the Confessor*: Kekelidze, ed., *Keimena*, 1:62.5; the Georgian version of John the Deacon, on which, see below: L. Datiashvili, ed., თეოდორე აბუკურა: ტრაქტატები და დიალოგები თარგმნილი ბერძნულიდან არსენ იყალთოელის მიერ (*Theodore Abū Qurrah: The Treatises and Dialogues Translated from Greek by Arsen Iq'altoeli*) (Tbilisi, 1980), 95.22, translating the original's "Coile Syria"; the Georgian version of the *Life of Symeon the Stylite*: G. Garitte, ed., *Vies géorgiennes de S. Syméon Stylite l'ancien et de S. Ephrem*, CSCO 171 (Louvain, 1957), 1.15; and the numerous examples in the New Testament (J. Molitor, *Glossarium Ibericum in Quattuor Evangelia et Actus Apostolorum*, vol. 2, CSCO 237 [Louvain, 1962], 425).

Such is the account of the Georgian version of the Passion. There is another account of Michael's martyrdom, however, one that has been incorporated into the Life of Theodore of Edessa,<sup>11</sup> a work that has been called, with just cause, "l'un des meilleurs échantillons du mensonge hagiographique, sous sa forme la plus effrontée."<sup>12</sup> The hero of this Life is a (fictitious?) bishop of Edessa who is said to have flourished in the middle of the ninth century. He, too, was thought to have been for a time a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas. The account of his life seems to have been drawn up no later than the tenth century, perhaps at the monastery of Mar Sabas.<sup>13</sup>

The differences between the two versions of Michael's martyrdom are significant. For our purposes, some of the more important of these concern the relation between the martyr and his spiritual father and the identity of the person who is said to narrate the account of Michael's martyrdom. While in the Passion Michael comes from Tiberias and enters into the monastic life at the monastery of Mar Sabas under Abba Moses, also from Tiberias, in the Life it is said that he was from Edessa and that he became a disciple of Theodore of Edessa.<sup>14</sup> In the Life, moreover, Theodore of Edessa and Michael are presented as being related by blood.<sup>15</sup> There is nothing in the Passion to suggest that Michael was a relative of Moses. Further, in the Life, it is not Abū Qurrah but the narrator (a certain Basil the bishop of Emesa, supposedly a nephew of Theodore of Edessa) who tells the story of Michael's martyrdom.<sup>16</sup> And finally, the Passion and the Life differ on when and how the remains of Michael's spiritual father came to be interred with those of Michael. While the Passion mentions the miraculous death of Moses seven days after the burial of Michael, the Life presents Theodore of Edessa as returning to the monastery of Mar Sabas only at the end of his career as bishop of Edessa. It was then, we are told, that his remains were laid to rest near those of "his kinsman Michael."<sup>17</sup>

Most who have examined the relation between the two versions of Michael's martyrdom are agreed that the Passion represents the more primitive account.<sup>18</sup> The version preserved in the Life, on the other hand, is thought to be reworking an earlier version of the Passion in such a way as to bring it into accord with the narrative of the events of Theodore of Edessa's life. Here is not the place to attempt to unravel the complicated question of the sources of the Life or of its manner of using those sources. Equally out of place here is a detailed analysis of how the two versions of Michael's martyrdom are related to each other. Much work remains to be done in both regards. The textual tradition of the Greek Life

<sup>11</sup> I. Pomialovskii, ed., *Житіє иже во святыхъ отца нашего Θεодора архієпископа Едесскаго* (*The Life of Our Father amongst the Saints Theodore the Archbishop of Edessa*) (St. Petersburg, 1892). The standard study of the Life remains A. Vasiliev, "The Life of St. Theodore of Edessa," *Byzantion* 16 (1942–43): 165–225.

<sup>12</sup> J. Gouillard, "Supercherries et méprises littéraires: L'œuvre de saint Théodore d'Édesse," *REB* 5 (1947): 137.

<sup>13</sup> For the date, see Peeters, "Michel le Sabaïte," 82–83, as well as Gouillard, "Supercherries et méprises littéraires," 137, and A. Abel, "La portée apologétique de la «vie» de St. Théodore d'Édesse," *BSI* 10 (1949): 239.

<sup>14</sup> Pomialovskii, ed., 14.11–15.4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.5, 86.4, 119.19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.14–15.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Peeters, "Michel le Sabaïte," 84; Griffith, "Michael, the Martyr and Monk," 120–21; Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 2.2:160–61; and Vasiliev, "Theodore of Edessa," 213–14.

and the Georgian Passion are not yet well understood.<sup>19</sup> Slavic versions of both the Life and the Passion have yet to be brought to bear on these questions. The Arabic version of the Life has yet to be published or analyzed. Nor do we yet understand how these various versions of Michael's Passion relate to similar stories found in the Life of John of Edessa and the Dialogue of Abraham of Tiberias.<sup>20</sup> Here let me content myself with a single question: Is there any reason to place confidence in the narrative of the Georgian version of the Passion, in particular its ascription of this account to Abū Qurrah and its description of him as a famous Sabaite monk?

One of the primary arguments for the historicity of the Passion and hence for the reliability of its reference to Abū Qurrah as a Sabaite monk has been that the remains of Michael are known to have been venerated at the monastery of Mar Sabas.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted, however, that the history of Michael's cult supports the account of the Life rather than that of the Passion. The early twelfth-century Russian pilgrim Daniel, who visited the monastery of Mar Sabas, called attention to the existence there of the relics of Theodore of Edessa and of his nephew Michael.<sup>22</sup> This clearly echoes the Life rather than the Passion. The same can be said of the twelfth-century Typikon of Mar Sabas (Sinai Gr. 1096), which commemorates on the same day "Our holy fathers Theodore of Edessa and Michael his nephew, who were from the lavra of the holy Sabas."<sup>23</sup> Similar observations can be made of the Melkite synaxaria, whose notices on Michael link him not to Abba Moses but to his uncle Theodore of Edessa. These include the versions preserved in Sinai Ar. 418, Paris Ar. 254, Berlin, Sachau 127 and 138, Vatican Syr. 243 and 412, and Vatican Ar. 472.<sup>24</sup> To the best of my knowledge, contrariwise, apart from the Georgian version of the Passion there is absolutely no evidence to suggest the existence of a Sabaite cult of Michael and Moses. This runs contrary, however, to what one might have expected if the Passion indeed reflects a more primitive account of Michael's martyrdom.<sup>25</sup> This is not to imply that the Life is a historical document. All evidence would tend to the opposite conclusion. I only wish to suggest that one cannot appeal to Michael's cult in order to support the historicity of the Passion's reference to Abū Qurrah as a Sabaite monk.

There are yet other reasons that should make one somewhat reticent to place much

<sup>19</sup> Kekelidze, in particular, utilized only a single manuscript for his edition of the Passion. At least one other is known; see P. Peeters, "De Codice Hiberico Bibliothecae Bodleianae Oxoniensis," *AB* 31 (1912): 307.

<sup>20</sup> For the Life of John of Edessa, see J. C. Lamoreaux and H. Khairallah, "The Arabic Version of the Life of John of Edessa," *Le Muséon* 113 (2000): 439–60. For the Dialogue of Abraham of Tiberias, see G. Bülus Marcuzzo, *Le dialogue d'Abraham de Tibériade avec 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Hāšimī à Jérusalem vers 820*, Textes et études sur l'orient chrétien 3 (Rome, 1986). I offer an examination of the textual tradition of the Life and its relation to these other texts in the introduction to a forthcoming critical edition of the Arabic version of the Life.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 2.2:159–60; idem, "Regard critique sur I. Dick, Th. Abū Qurra, De l'existence du Créateur et de la vraie religion" (pt. 1), *ProC* 36 (1986): 53–54.

<sup>22</sup> B. de Khitrowo, trans., *Itinéraires russes en orient*, vol. 1.1 (Geneva, 1889), 34.

<sup>23</sup> See J.-M. Sauget, *Premières recherches sur l'origine et les caractéristiques des synaxaires melkites (XIe–XVIIe siècles)*, SubsHag 45 (Brussels, 1969), 411.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> One could, of course, assume that the Life's account of the martyrdom generated the cult, or perhaps that an original cult of Moses and Michael was transformed into a cult of Theodore and Michael. Both scenarios are hard to imagine, however, especially in that one would have to posit these transformations to have taken place at the very monastery in which their remains were buried.

confidence in the narrative of the Passion and hence in its reference to Abū Qurrah as a Sabaite monk. The whole tenor of the text is naively legendary. The Passion as we have it is very much a calque on the biblical account of Joseph and Mrs. Potiphar, the narrative presentation of which forms the backdrop for a religious debate among Michael, the caliph, and a Jew. And this is a debate characterized by not a little witty and humorous repartee—no doubt offering much pleasure to the original hearers of the text. Though the historical background presupposed by the text is not “entièrement imaginaire,” Peeters thought the Passion to be legendary.<sup>26</sup> Griffith, too, seems to incline to this position.<sup>27</sup> So also, Robert G. Hoyland is suspicious of its historicity.<sup>28</sup> But if Michael is a legendary character, should we assume that Basil, the supposed narrator of the Passion, is the one responsible for crafting this account of Michael’s attempted seduction, triumphant debate, and victorious martyrdom? And if Basil could craft this, could he not have crafted the reference to an equally imaginary source?

Equally detrimental to any attempt to place trust in the Passion are its historical infelicities and anachronisms. First, as noted above, the Passion suggests that ‘Abd al-Malik came to Jerusalem from Babylon, that is, Baghdad.<sup>29</sup> The problem: ‘Abd al-Malik was an Umayyad, not an Abbasid caliph. He would, thus, not have come to Jerusalem from Baghdad, which city had not yet been founded, an event that would not take place for nearly fifty years.<sup>30</sup> Second, the Passion presents Abū Qurrah as an eyewitness to and participant in the burial of both Michael and Moses.<sup>31</sup> This is simply impossible and must be rejected—otherwise we would have to imagine Abū Qurrah to have lived for some one hundred and fifty years, for other, more reliable sources have him still alive in the early decades of the ninth century. Finally, Michael is said to have been buried in “the tomb of the martyrs, the fathers, and the burned martyrs.” As is clear from a later parallel (§15), the “burned martyrs” here are the twenty martyrs of Mar Sabas. The problem: these twenty monks had not yet been martyred at the time of Michael’s death; indeed, they would not be martyred for nearly a century, meeting their fate only in 797. All of these incongruities are hard to understand if it was indeed Abū Qurrah who had transmitted to Basil this account of Michael’s martyrdom.

One final point needs to be noted, and this is the fact that the Passion calls Abū Qur-

<sup>26</sup> Peeters, “Michel le Sabaïte,” 78.

<sup>27</sup> Griffith, “Michael, the Martyr and Monk,” 143–46.

<sup>28</sup> R. G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 13 (Princeton, N.J., 1997), 380–81.

<sup>29</sup> A similar itinerary is posited by the Greek Life (Pomialovskii, ed., 17.19). That Baghdad might be called Babylon is not without parallel in other, roughly contemporary Melkite hagiographic texts. The Georgian version of the Passion of Romanos the Neomartyr, for instance, at one point refers to “Babylon, that is, Baghdad.” See P. Peeters, trans., “S. Romain le néomartyr († 1 mai 780) d’après un document géorgien,” *AB* 30 (1911): 412.8. Something similar is found in the Greek version of the Life of Theodore of Edessa, which makes mention of “Babylon, which is now called by the Persians Baghdad” (Pomialovskii, ed., 72. 22–23).

<sup>30</sup> Peeters, “Michel le Sabaïte,” 77, recognized the Passion’s reference to Babylon/Baghdad as an “anachronisme scandaleux.” Others, too, have recognized the anachronism, but sought, rather, to explain it in such a way as to preserve the essential historicity of the account. Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 2.2:159 note 305, wants to suggest that it is a question here not of Baghdad but of Damascus. Griffith, “Michael, the Martyr and Monk,” 133, seems to posit a slip or mistake on the part of the narrator of the Passion.

<sup>31</sup> Both Peeters, “Michel le Sabaïte,” 80–81, and Griffith, “Michael, the Martyr and Monk,” 127, have also noted this anachronism.

rah—quite offhandedly—the “wonderworker of Babylon.” There is little evidence, and perhaps none, to suggest that Abū Qurrah had even visited Baghdad, much less that he was thought to have performed miracles there. As for the performance of miracles in the Abbasid capital, I know of absolutely no other source to suggest such a thing. Did Abū Qurrah ever visit Baghdad? Clear references to such a visit are lacking in the sources known to me. One passage in Abū Qurrah’s writings, however, has been taken to suggest such a visit.<sup>32</sup> In his tract *On the Existence of God and the True Religion*, Abū Qurrah imagines himself to have grown up on an uninhabited mountain. One day, he descends to the civilized regions, where he encounters adherents of the various religions and must find a way to decide which of these religions is true. In introducing his thought experiment, Abū Qurrah describes his descent to civilization as follows: “I grew up on a mountain, on which I knew not [other] people. One day, on account of a need that befell me, I descended to *al-madā’in* and to the community of [other] people, and I observed that they had different religions.” At issue is the word *al-madā’in*. It can mean “the cities,” which would make perfect sense in the context of Abū Qurrah’s thought experiment. Contrariwise, it could be a reference to al-Madā’in (ancient Seleucia-Ctesiphon), which was destroyed when the caliph al-Manṣūr built Baghdad. The passage has been taken in the latter sense, and, on the assumption that the passage is *autobiographical*, it has been suggested that Abū Qurrah resided there for a time before the building of Baghdad.<sup>33</sup> It would be hard to imagine less substantial evidence for a sojourn by Abū Qurrah in Baghdad. Indeed, the whole of the passage’s context speaks against this interpretation: we are dealing here with a thought experiment.

If there is no evidence that Abū Qurrah was thought to have performed miracles in Baghdad, and if, moreover, there is little or no evidence to suggest that Abū Qurrah even visited Baghdad, to what then is allusion being made when Basil, the author of the *Passion*, calls him the “wonderworker of Babylon”—seemingly something for which he was quite well known? Oddly enough, the *Passion* would here make far more sense if the reference were not to Theodore Abū Qurrah, but to Theodore of Edessa. As noted above, the latter Theodore was likewise believed to have been a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas and later a bishop in Syria. Unlike Abū Qurrah, however, he was thought to have traveled to Baghdad, where he performed numerous miracles, not least curing a caliph of a grave illness, an event that—according to the *Life*—led to that caliph’s conversion to Christianity.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, it was as a wonderworker in Babylon that Theodore of Edessa was remembered by later Melkites. In an epitome of the Arabic version of the *Life* of Theodore of Edessa, for instance, this is how one later Melkite remembered this phase of Theodore’s career: “He then went to the city of Babylon and cured its king of a grave illness, baptizing him and teaching him the Christian faith; he further baptized and illumined there many other pagans, doing among them numerous miracles.”<sup>35</sup> Nothing even remotely similar to this is found in any of the sources on Abū Qurrah’s life. And again, it should be empha-

<sup>32</sup> I. Dick, ed., *Théodore Abuqurra: Traité de l’existence du Créateur et de la vraie religion*, Patrimoine arabe chrétien 3 (Jounieh–Rome, 1982), 200ff.

<sup>33</sup> Based on this passage, Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 2.2:110, thinks a visit by Abū Qurrah to Baghdad quite likely, while Dick, “Continuateur arabe,” 122–23, considers it merely a possibility.

<sup>34</sup> Pomialovskii, ed., 85–86.

<sup>35</sup> Macarius III b. al-Za’im, *Akhbār al-qiddīsīn alladhīna kharajū min bilādīnā* (British Library, ms. ar. ch. 38 = add. 9965, fol. 32a).

sized, the Passion's notice fits Theodore of Edessa in other ways too: not only was he thought once to have been a Sabaite monk, he was also believed to have been a bishop in Syria.

If the Passion here seems to describe Theodore of Edessa rather than Theodore Abū Qurrah, what are we to make of the Passion's other references to our Theodore? In crafting the original version of his Passion, perhaps Basil claimed to have received this account of Michael's martyrdom not from Theodore Abū Qurrah but from Theodore of Edessa. If so, might it not be that at some point in the textual history of the Passion a scribe sought to clarify the seemingly ambiguous reference, suggesting that the Theodore of Edessa in question was none other than Theodore Abū Qurrah, also a native of Edessa? Or maybe it was not a scribe but the Georgian translator who sought to clarify the text. Or perhaps the source of the confusion was Basil himself. The Passion's infelicitous anachronisms suggest that Basil compiled the work—carelessly—from an earlier written source. Might it not be that this earlier source was attributed to a Theodore of Mar Sabas and that Basil, in crafting his account, identified this Theodore with a conflated version of Theodore Abū Qurrah and Theodore of Edessa? Answers to these questions can be only speculative at present: much work remains to be done on both the Life and the Passion. One possibility that must be considered, however, is that the Passion is not simply a translation into Georgian of a primitive and "authentic" Arabic version of the text. The textual history of the work must have been far more complex.

Whatever the case, is there any reason to place much confidence in the Passion's testimony that Abū Qurrah was a Sabaite monk? The weight of the evidence suggests that this is a question that should be answered in the negative. The history of Michael's cult does not support the historicity of the Passion and hence the reliability of its reference to Abū Qurrah as a Sabaite monk. The same can be said for the whole tenor of the Passion, which is naively legendary. Moreover, the Passion is riven by a number of grave historical improbabilities and anachronisms for which it is hard to account if in fact Abū Qurrah had transmitted the account of Michael's death to Basil. Worse still, the Passion's description of Abū Qurrah would make far more sense if the reference were not to Theodore Abū Qurrah, but to Theodore of Edessa.

In sum, the Passion of Michael the Sabaite has far less probative value than one might wish. If this is the case, what of the proposition that Abū Qurrah was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas? It is the Passion and it alone that explicitly identifies Abū Qurrah as having been a monk at that monastery. All other evidence that has been cited to support this proposition is less specific, and has most often been called upon only to support further the testimony of the Passion. It is to this other evidence that I now turn: first to the evidence internal to Abū Qurrah's own works and then to what might be called ancillary evidence.

#### INTERNAL EVIDENCE

The single most important piece of internal evidence supporting Abū Qurrah's connection to the monastery of Mar Sabas is the title of the eighteenth of his Greek works,<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> PG 94:1596B.



which links Abū Qurrah to John of Damascus, who is usually thought to have been a Sabaite monk.<sup>37</sup> In Migne, this reads: “From the Refutations of the Saracens by Theodore Abū Qurrah the Bishop of Ḥarrān—Through the Voice (διὰ φωνῆς) of John of Damascus.” The meaning of the expression διὰ φωνῆς is something of a problem. As was demonstrated by Marcel Richard, this is an expression that can signify a number of different things.<sup>38</sup> Up to the eighth century, it most commonly indicated that the work in question (here, one by Abū Qurrah) is derived from the lectures or oral teachings of someone else (here, John of Damascus). By the ninth century, however, the expression had begun to take on a new sense, now meaning simply that the work in question was written “by” someone (in this case, John of Damascus). If we take the title in its first sense, we have to make Abū Qurrah a disciple of the Damascene, one able to have heard his teachings orally. While this supposition raises some chronological problems, as John of Damascus seems to have died ca. 750, it has, nevertheless, been accepted by some.<sup>39</sup> If, on the other hand, we take the expression in the latter sense, it would have to signify that the work in question was written not by Theodore Abū Qurrah, but by John of Damascus, who was, however, transmitting the teachings of Abū Qurrah—a supposition that again introduces chronological problems in that John of Damascus was born some seventy years before Abū Qurrah. No end of trouble has been caused by this title. The best way out of these chronological impasses has been to limit the sense of the title, taking it in its first sense, but making Abū Qurrah transmit the written teachings or theological legacy of the Damascene.<sup>40</sup>

There is no need here to rehearse the details of the controversy occasioned by the title to the eighteenth of Abū Qurrah’s Greek works. The problem is, quite simply, no longer a problem. The recent critical edition of the work in question has established that we should read not “John of Damascus” but “John the Deacon.”<sup>41</sup> The critical edition has also established that the work in question was not even written by Abū Qurrah. Rather, it is one of a number of short dialogues that together comprise John the Deacon’s account of a series of debates between Abū Qurrah and a variety of Muslim interlocutors.<sup>42</sup> It was, however, John the Deacon who wrote the work, not Abū Qurrah. There is nothing here any longer to support the proposition that Abū Qurrah was the spiritual if not physical disciple of the famous Sabaite John of Damascus. While there is no reason that Abū Qurrah might not have been acquainted with the writings of John of Damascus, this important link between the two has now been severed. So also, this link between Abū Qurrah and the monastery of Mar Sabas has now been severed, and there is little hope that it can be repaired.

There is one additional piece of internal evidence that has been cited to support the

<sup>37</sup> M.-F. Auzépy, in particular, has recently called into question whether John of Damascus was in fact a Sabaite monk. See below, note 87.

<sup>38</sup> M. Richard, “ΑΠΟ ΦΩΝΗΣ,” *Byzantion* 20 (1950): 191–222.

<sup>39</sup> For instance, Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 2.2:109–10.

<sup>40</sup> Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, 19. Cf. his more recent work, “Byzantium and the Christians in the World of Islam: Constantinople and the Church in the Holy Land in the Ninth Century,” *Medieval Encounters* 3 (1997): 254.

<sup>41</sup> R. Gleis and A. Th. Khoury, eds. and trans., *Johannes Damaskenos und Theodor Abū Qurra: Schriften zum Islam*, Corpus Islamo-Christianum: Series Graeca 3 (Würzburg, 1995), 86.2.

<sup>42</sup> This is clear from John the Deacon’s introduction, the Greek original of which is now edited for the first time in Gleis and Khoury, eds., 86.2–88.56. A Georgian version of the same has long been available (Datiashvili, ed., 94–95).

proposition that Abū Qurrah was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas.<sup>43</sup> This is one of his Arabic works, his letter to David the Monophysite. In the introduction to this work, Abū Qurrah recalls that he had met David while the two of them were praying in the holy places of Jerusalem. This David, who must have been a bishop,<sup>44</sup> had asked Abū Qurrah for an exposition of the character of the union of natures in Christ. After their parting, Abū Qurrah set himself the task of responding to David's request. What resulted was Abū Qurrah's most detailed investigation of a christological theme. For our purposes, what is important is the end of the letter, where Abū Qurrah invokes God's blessings on his correspondent: "We ask God that he not turn away from you or from anyone else who seeks his face in an honest manner—[we ask this] through the prayers of the Theotokos Mary and the prayers of our father the holy Sabas, in whose monastery was copied the book from which this book was copied, and through the prayers of all the holy and pure fathers, whose faith is the upright faith of Orthodoxy, who acknowledge the six holy councils, and through the prayers of everyone who believes in the faith that is upright and acceptable [to God], that is, the faith of the council of Chalcedon and its holy participants. Amen."<sup>45</sup> A number of points should be noted about this passage. That Abū Qurrah accepted as ecumenical only the first six councils is clear from other works of his.<sup>46</sup> Nor is it particularly unusual: others of his Melkite contemporaries had not yet granted ecumenical status to the seventh council.<sup>47</sup> But what of the reference to Mar Sabas, the only saint that he mentions by name? If this passage were taken at face value, it could be interpreted to suggest that Abū Qurrah had, at the very least, a special connection to that saint's monastery, or perhaps even that he had himself been a monk at that monastery.

The reference to Mar Sabas here cannot be taken at face value, however. The text of the letter has clearly been subject to scribal interpolation, especially in and around the reference to Mar Sabas.<sup>48</sup> The sole edition of the letter is that prepared in 1904 by Bāshā. This edition was based on a single manuscript preserved in Dayr al-Mukhalliṣ, a manuscript that had been copied in 1735 by metropolitan Basil Fīnān. As is clear from his colophons,<sup>49</sup> Basil had transcribed his manuscript from a copy of a copy that had once been preserved in the monastery of Mar Sabas.

A marginal note of its copyist, the metropolitan Basil: Know that this [copy] is a second copy of the copy that is in the monastery of Mar Sabas, the lavra near Jerusalem, which [latter manuscript] is the original copy of the book on the basis of which this copy was copied.

Written by the sinful metropolitan Basil Fīnān from an older copy [lit. from the book of its old copy], which was in turn copied<sup>50</sup> from the original copy that is in the monastery of Mar Sabas, the lavra in the district of the noble Jerusalem . . . the date of the copy from

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Dick, "Continueur arabe," 122; Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, 20; and Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 2.2:111.

<sup>44</sup> Qusṭanṭīn al-Bāshā, *Mayāmīr Thāwudūrus Abī Qurrah Usqf Harrān* (Beirut, 1904), 139.5, in particular the reference to David's flock.

<sup>45</sup> Bāshā, ed., 139.12–17.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., *ibid.*, 70.12–14, 171–72.

<sup>47</sup> See S. H. Griffith, "Muslims and Church Councils: The Apology of Theodore Abū Qurrah," *StP* 25 (Louvain, 1993): 270–99.

<sup>48</sup> As was long ago recognized by Georg Graf in his *Die arabischen Schriften des Theodor Abū Qurra, Bischofs von Harrān* (ca. 740–820), *Forschungen zur christlichen Literatur- und Dogmengeschichte* 10.3/4 (Paderborn, 1910), 11. He was not sure, however, where the interpolation began or ended.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in the introduction to Bāshā's edition at p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> Reading *mansūkhah* for *mansūjah*.

which we copied this book was 6559 A.M. [1051 A.D.] and it was the work of the monk Agapius from the monastery of Mar Elias on Jabal al-Lukkām. . . .

At least part of the passage from the end of Abū Qurrah's letter to David must have been penned by this monk Agapius. This is clearly the case with the phrase "in whose monastery was copied the book from which this book was copied." This expression simply cannot be understood if it is assumed that Abū Qurrah himself had written it. Contrariwise, it makes perfect sense if it is assumed to have been added by Agapius. But what of the rest of the passage, in particular the invocation of Mar Sabas? Was this in the copy that formed the basis for Agapius's transcription, or was it something that he himself added? The former possibility is perhaps slightly more likely, but as yet this is a difficulty that cannot be resolved. And it may be that it will never be resolved, for it seems that the only extant manuscript of Abū Qurrah's letter to David is that utilized by Bāshā.<sup>51</sup>

#### ANCILLARY EVIDENCE

I turn now to the final points of evidence that have been called upon to support the proposition that Abū Qurrah was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas. While none of this evidence can by itself prove decisively that he was a Sabaite monk, together it has been thought to lend support to other, more determinative evidence, in particular the testimony of the Passion of Michael the Sabaite.

As just noted, a copy of Abū Qurrah's Arabic works was once preserved at the monastery of Mar Sabas. It has been suggested on a number of occasions that this points to Abū Qurrah's links to the monastery, perhaps even that he carried out the final editing of his works there, toward the end of his life.<sup>52</sup> But this seems a heavy burden for this piece of evidence to bear. That a copy of his works was there preserved—by itself, this proves only that his works were an object of interest to the monks of the monastery.

In a similar vein, occasionally appeal has been made to Abū Qurrah's Palestinian connections to support the proposition that he was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas.<sup>53</sup> His Palestinian connections are evident in his letter to David. As mentioned above, in it Abū Qurrah recalls meeting David while the two of them were in Jerusalem visiting the holy places.<sup>54</sup> This meeting might have taken place while Abū Qurrah was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas. It should be noted, however, that the description of their meeting could just as well suggest that Abū Qurrah was there as a pilgrim from further abroad, perhaps from Ḥarrān. Abū Qurrah's Palestinian connections are also to be seen in the fourth of his Greek works, a tract on christology that he wrote for the patriarch of Jerusalem.<sup>55</sup> Its title reads, in part: "An epistle . . . sent by the blessed pope Thomas, the patriarch of Jerusalem, to the heretics of Armenia—written in Arabic by Theodore Abū Qurrah the bishop of Ḥarrān and translated by Michael the presbyter and syncellus of the apostolic throne, with whom it was also sent." Again, however, there is nothing to suggest that it was composed while Abū Qurrah was a Sabaite monk. Indeed, if the title is to be trusted, it must be concluded that he wrote it as the bishop of Ḥarrān.

<sup>51</sup> See Nasrallah, *Histoire*, 2.2:120, and Graf, *Geschichte*, 2:13.

<sup>52</sup> See, e.g., Dick, "Continueur arabe," 125, and Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, 20.

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., Dick, "Continueur arabe," 122.

<sup>54</sup> Bāshā, ed., 104.15–18.

<sup>55</sup> PG 97:1504–22.

The new critical edition of some of the Greek works once ascribed to Abū Qurrah also provides two additional pieces of evidence linking him to Palestinian circles. Both are provided by John the Deacon's work, which purports to record Abū Qurrah's debates with a number of Muslims.<sup>56</sup> The introduction to this work states specifically that Abū Qurrah, "the most blessed and most philosophical bishop of Ḥarrān," came to visit the southern Palestinian city of Azotus<sup>57</sup> in order to aid the Christians there in argument against the Muslims.<sup>58</sup> The second is found at the beginning of one of John the Deacon's dialogues, where a variant states that this dialogue has as its setting an encounter between Abū Qurrah and a Saracen, when the "blessed bishop" was coming down from Jerusalem: "Whence one of the hypocrites came up behind the blessed bishop as he was coming down from Jerusalem, and without greeting him immediately said: 'Christian, testify that God is one and without partners and that Muhammad is his servant and apostle.' Theodore [answered] . . ."<sup>59</sup> Again, however, it should be noted that neither of these two passages suggests that it was as a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas that Abū Qurrah encountered these Muslims. On the contrary, both passages explicitly state that he was at the time a bishop.

Finally, there is one last piece of evidence linking Abū Qurrah to Palestine and to Jerusalem in particular. This is the introduction to the so-called "Questions and Answers from the Voice of the Virtuous Father Theodore Abū Qurrah the Bishop of Ḥarrān, against the Outsiders." This work is preserved in a single manuscript, Sbath 1324, copied in 1773. Unfortunately, this manuscript seems now to be lost.<sup>60</sup> Its incipit, however, as recorded in Paul Sbath's catalogue, is said to have read: "Question One. Abū Qurrah said . . . 'I was approached by a Muslim and a number of his companions. This took place while I and a group of Christians were at the sepulcher of Christ our God.' . . ."<sup>61</sup> Again, we here have evidence for a visit by Abū Qurrah to Palestine, but nothing to suggest that this visit took place while Abū Qurrah was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas. Indeed, the title of this work explicitly identifies Abū Qurrah as the bishop of Ḥarrān.

#### NEGATIVE EVIDENCE

If Abū Qurrah had, in fact, been a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas, it might be expected that the titles of his numerous works would bear witness to this fact. This is not the case, however. Among Abū Qurrah's many works preserved in Arabic, Georgian, and

<sup>56</sup> Contrary to the conclusions of Glei and Khoury, from the manuscript tradition of John's work it seems clear that it consisted originally of only his Preface and nine dialogues (*opuscula* 18–25, 32). It is thus that I treat it in what follows. On this subject, see my "Theodore Abū Qurrah and John the Deacon" (forthcoming).

<sup>57</sup> That is, Ashdod.

<sup>58</sup> Contrary to what might be expected from the formatting of the critical edition here (Glei and Khoury, eds., 88), it may be that only the first of the dialogues is to be understood as having taken place in Azotus. In other words, 88.53–56 should, perhaps, be understood as the introduction to *opusculum* 18 alone. This is how the editor of the Georgian version interpreted the passage (Datiashvili, ed., 96.3–6).

<sup>59</sup> Glei and Khoury, eds., 94, with variant to lines 4–6, which also reflects the reading of the Georgian version (Datiashvili, ed., 98.10–12).

<sup>60</sup> At any rate, it and many other of Sbath's manuscripts are not to be found with the rest of his collection in the Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana. See Anton Heinen's comments in his article (dated 1990) on the Arabic manuscripts of Vatican City, in G. Roper, ed., *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*, vol. 3 (London, 1994), 635.

<sup>61</sup> Paul Sbath, *Bibliothèque de manuscrits*, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1928–34), 3:116.

Greek, it seems that not one is provided with a title that records that he was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas. This is, of course, an argument from silence. Even so, the extent of the negative evidence is overwhelming. Not all of his works bear titles that provide biographical information on their author, but many do. And of those that do, they are unanimous that their author was not a Sabaite monk but the bishop of Ḥarrān.

As for those of his Arabic works published by Bāshā,<sup>62</sup> one names its author as Abū Qurrah.<sup>63</sup> The other nine works, contrariwise, are all ascribed to “Theodore the bishop of Ḥarrān.”<sup>64</sup> His tract in defense of the veneration of icons, similarly, is ascribed both at its beginning and end to “Theodore Abū Qurrah the bishop of Ḥarrān.”<sup>65</sup> The unedited panegyric on al-Maʾmūn, too, is attributed to “Abū Qurrah the bishop of Ḥarrān.”<sup>66</sup> The same can be said of the two short Arabic sayings published by Sidney H. Griffith from a manuscript dating to 897, which sayings are explicitly attributed to “Theodore Abū Qurrah the bishop of Ḥarrān.”<sup>67</sup> Of the two short works that have been published by Ignace Dick, both name their author as a bishop of Ḥarrān: the first, as Abū Qurrah in one manuscript, but “Theodore the bishop of Ḥarrān who was known as Abū Qurrah” in another;<sup>68</sup> the second, as “Theodore the bishop of Ḥarrān.”<sup>69</sup> Similarly, one of the unedited Lenten homilies ascribed to Abū Qurrah is attributed in three separate manuscripts to “Theodore the bishop of Ḥarrān.”<sup>70</sup> Finally, the lost “Questions and Answers” mentioned above was explicitly attributed to “Theodore Abū Qurrah the Bishop of Ḥarrān.”<sup>71</sup>

Of the Greek works, some are now known not to have been composed by Abū Qurrah, but by John the Deacon. Of those whose attribution to Abū Qurrah can be maintained, eight have titles that provide biographical information on their author. Four of these are attributed to “Theodore Abū Qurrah the bishop of Ḥarrān.”<sup>72</sup> Two are ascribed to “Theodore the bishop of Ḥarrān,”<sup>73</sup> while another is said to be by “Theodore Abū Qurrah, the philosopher, the bishop of Ḥarrān.”<sup>74</sup> Finally, there is one Greek work that has variant ascriptions, either to “Theodore the bishop” or to “Theodore Abū Qurrah the bishop of Ḥarrān.”<sup>75</sup> It should be noted, however, that the manuscript tradition of Abū Qurrah’s Greek works is far more complex than the above indications might suggest. Many of these titles vary from manuscript to manuscript. Many of the works that do not contain bio-

<sup>62</sup> While the manuscript tradition of Abū Qurrah’s Arabic works shows some variation in the form of the titles, to the best of my knowledge no copy identifies him as a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas, or even as a monk.

<sup>63</sup> That is, his letter to David (Bāshā, ed., 104).

<sup>64</sup> See Bāshā, ed., 9, 23, 48, 71, 75, 83, 91, 140, 180.

<sup>65</sup> I. Dick, ed., *Théodore Abuqurra: Traité du culte des icônes*, Patrimoine arabe chrétien 10 (Jounieh–Rome, 1986), 85 and 219.

<sup>66</sup> See I. Dick, “Deux écrits inédits de Théodore Abuqurra,” *Le Muséon* 72 (1959): 54.

<sup>67</sup> S. H. Griffith, “Some Unpublished Arabic Sayings Attributed to Theodore Abu Qurrah,” *Le Muséon* 92 (1979): 29.

<sup>68</sup> Dick, “Deux écrits inédits,” 56.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>70</sup> The relevant incipits are cited in Samir, “Sīrat Thāwudūrus Abī Qurrah,” 435.

<sup>71</sup> Sbath, *Bibliothèque de manuscrits*, 3:116.

<sup>72</sup> PG 97:1461, 1492 (= Glei and Khoury, eds., 128), 1504, 1521.

<sup>73</sup> PG 97:1524, 1597.

<sup>74</sup> PG 97:1565.

<sup>75</sup> PG 97:1540. The variant titles are given in Glei and Khoury, eds., 148.

graphical information in their titles as presented in Migne do have such information in the titles found in the manuscripts. Nonetheless, of the approximately one hundred Greek manuscripts of Abū Qurrah's works with which I am familiar, there is not one instance of a work that bears a title that identifies him as a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas.

As for John the Deacon's record of Abū Qurrah's debates, this, too, provides a picture similar to Abū Qurrah's own works: Abū Qurrah is either referred to as bishop by the narrator or addressed as such by Muslims. In his introduction, furthermore, John the Deacon specifically identifies Abū Qurrah as "Theodore the most blessed and most philosophical bishop of Ḥarrān in Coile Syria." Something similar is found in the Georgian translation of John the Deacon's work, which identifies him as "the very holy and most philosophical Theodore the bishop of Ḥarrān in Syria."<sup>76</sup> Similar observations can be made about the bodies of the dialogues, where Abū Qurrah is often portrayed as being addressed by Muslim interlocutors as "bishop."<sup>77</sup> Almost all of these passages are also paralleled in the Georgian translation.<sup>78</sup> At the same time, some of the sections of John the Deacon's work, which were in time dismembered and separately transmitted as works by Abū Qurrah, bear titles that ascribe them to "Theodore Abū Qurrah the bishop of Ḥarrān."<sup>79</sup>

Like the titles of Abū Qurrah's works and the testimony of John the Deacon, other sources for the life of Abū Qurrah know him only as the bishop of Ḥarrān, but never as a monk at Mar Sabas. These sources stem from a variety of different times and places; they all, nonetheless, remembered Abū Qurrah only as a bishop. Michael the Syrian (d. 1199) knew him as "Theodoricus the bishop of Ḥarrān."<sup>80</sup> So also, the anonymous Monophysite chronicle *Ad Annum 1234* refers to him as "Theodore the bishop of Ḥarrān, who was named Abū Qurrah."<sup>81</sup> Yet another Monophysite author, Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), knew him as "Theodoricus of Ḥarrān."<sup>82</sup> It was also as a bishop that he was remembered by the Muslim Ibn al-Nadīm (d. ca. 385/995), who knew him as "Abū Qurrah the Melkite bishop of Ḥarrān."<sup>83</sup> In the same way, the title of Abū Qurrah's Arabic translation of Pseudo-Aristotle's *De virtutibus animae* calls him "Abū Qurrah the bishop of Ḥarrān."<sup>84</sup> Finally, the *Ekthesis* of John Kyparissiotēs (d. 1378), referring to an otherwise unknown anti-Manichaean synod, on two occasions records words ascribed to Abū Qurrah, once introducing them as being from "Abū Qurrah the bishop of Ḥarrān" and once as being from "the bishop of Ḥarrān."<sup>85</sup>

Nor should it pass unobserved that none of the sources on the monastery of Mar Sabas

<sup>76</sup> Datashvili, ed., 95.21–22.

<sup>77</sup> See, e.g., 88.52, 88.57, 94.4–6 (with variant), 102.5, 102.18–19, 114.2, 118.9, and 124.3–4.

<sup>78</sup> See Datashvili, ed., 95.33, 96.5, 98.10–12 (confirming the variant), 100.36–101.1, 101.18, 105.28, 108.13. There is no parallel for Gle and Khoury, eds., 118.9, in that the whole of *opusculum* 25 is lacking in the Georgian version of John's work.

<sup>79</sup> PG 94:1595, 97.1583–84 (Latin only).

<sup>80</sup> J.-B. Chabot, ed. and trans., *Chronique de Michel le Syrien*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1899–1910), 3:32.

<sup>81</sup> J.-B. Chabot, ed., *Anonymi Auctoris Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 Pertinens*, vol. 2, CSCO 109 (Paris, 1916), 23.10.

<sup>82</sup> See Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, 19, citing J. S. Assemanus, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, vol. 2 (Rome, 1721), 292 note 3.

<sup>83</sup> Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ed. Riḍā Tajaddud (anonymous reprint), 26, reading *Qurrah* for 'Izzah.

<sup>84</sup> See Griffith, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, 25–26.

<sup>85</sup> PG 152:784, 809 (Latin only); for the Greek, see B. Hemmerdinger, "Le synode réuni par Théodore Abū Qurra contre les manichéens (Ḥarrān, 764–765?)," *RHR* 161 (1962): 270.

in the eighth and ninth centuries (of which there are some significant ones, not least the Life of Stephen of Mar Sabas and the Passion of the Twenty Martyrs of Mar Sabas)<sup>86</sup> mentions Abū Qurrah as having been a monk there—excepting, of course, the historically dubious Passion of Michael the Sabaite.

In sum, for some five hundred years, from one end of the Near East to the other, among Melkites, Jacobites, and Byzantines, and even among Muslims, no one remembered Abū Qurrah to have been a Sabaite monk. Arguments from silence are not without difficulties. Here, however, the weight of the evidence is so great that if one continues to maintain that Abū Qurrah was a Sabaite monk, one should at least attempt to suggest why no one remembered him as such—neither the scribes who transmitted his works, nor John the Deacon, nor any of the many other persons who were familiar with his legacy. Why remember him merely as the bishop of an unimportant see in northern Syria, if he had, in fact, also been a monk in what was unarguably the most important Melkite monastery in the early Islamic period and a bastion of orthodoxy closely affiliated with both the patriarchates of Jerusalem and Antioch?

#### CONCLUSION

To my knowledge, the material discussed here is all that is available to support the proposition that Abū Qurrah was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas. As has been suggested, the evidence is slight. One text alone, the Passion of Michael the Sabaite, states explicitly that Abū Qurrah was a monk at that monastery. But its testimony is, as has been argued, of dubious value. The Passion has few claims to historical accuracy. The whole tenor of the text speaks against its historicity, as also does what little is known of Michael's cult. The Passion is further characterized by not a few historical incongruities, including a chronology that is impossible to reconcile with other, more sure data we have on Abū Qurrah's life. Further, its description of Abū Qurrah as someone who worked wonders in Babylon simply does not fit the other evidence we have on his life, though oddly enough it does fit well what is known of Theodore of Edessa. In sum, the evidence offered by the Passion of Michael should, I think, be given far less weight than has been the case in recent attempts to reconstruct the biography of Abū Qurrah.

If the Passion goes, what of the other evidence? The link between Abū Qurrah and John of Damascus provided by the eighteenth of the former's Greek works can no longer be sustained: the critical edition has, quite simply, done away with it. As for the passage in his letter to David where Abū Qurrah invokes Mar Sabas, this is of dubious textual standing. Moreover, it should be recalled that neither of these pieces of evidence explicitly identifies Abū Qurrah as a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas. At best, they can be argued to provide support for the testimony of the Passion. As for what has been termed "ancillary" evidence, while it supports the thesis that Abū Qurrah had connections with Palestine, it can in no way be taken to suggest that those contacts occurred while he was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas. Indeed, in some cases those contacts are specifically described as taking place while he was the bishop of Ḥarrān. At the same time, while there is a large body of biographical material preserved in the titles to Abū Qurrah's works, none of it de-

<sup>86</sup> Respectively, *AASS* July 3:524–613, and March 3:2\*–14\*.

scribes him as a Sabaite monk. This holds not only for his Arabic works, but also for those preserved in Greek. John the Deacon, too, is silent on Abū Qurrah's having been a monk, though he does on numerous occasions describe Abū Qurrah as the bishop of Ḥarrān. Finally, of the many Christian and Muslim sources for the life of Abū Qurrah, not one remembered him to have been a monk at Mar Sabas. They do, however, often describe him as the bishop of Ḥarrān.

In sum, evidence that Abū Qurrah was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas is slight at best and nonexistent at worst. While there is no reason that he might not have been a monk at that monastery, there is little or no reason to think that he was. If Abū Qurrah is severed from the monastery of Mar Sabas, important implications would follow for how we approach his legacy. First, there would be a need to reexamine whether and to what extent Abū Qurrah's theological labors reflect the tradition of southern Palestine, more broadly, and of the monastery of Mar Sabas, in particular. One can no longer take it for granted, especially, that Abū Qurrah was the "continuateur arabe" of that monastery's most famous theologian, John of Damascus—if, that is, the Damascene was himself a Sabaite monk, something that has recently been called into question by Marie-France Auzépy.<sup>87</sup> Second, one must be open to contextualizing Abū Qurrah's works against the theological and social background of Mesopotamia and northern Syria. Third, Abū Qurrah's works would need to be used more circumspectly in attempts to understand the Sabaite theological tradition in the early Abbasid period. One should not, in particular, be too quick to extrapolate from Abū Qurrah's notions to those of the monastery of Mar Sabas. This should prove significant for those concerned with numerous issues, perhaps especially the role of the Sabaites in the defense of icons and the Sabaites' notions of papal and conciliar authority. But all these are matters for another time.<sup>88</sup> Here I am content to suggest that those concerned with Abū Qurrah and his legacy might wish to reconsider the proposition that he was a monk at the monastery of Mar Sabas.

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<sup>87</sup> See her "De la Palestine à Constantinople (VIIIe–IXe siècles): Étienne le Sabaïte et Jean Damascène," *TM* 12 (1994): 183–218, esp. 183 note 3, as well as her "Les Sabaïtes et l'iconoclasme," esp. 305 note 2, in J. Patrich, ed., *The Sabaïte Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present* (Leuven, 2001). I am grateful to Professor Auzépy for an advance copy of the latter.

<sup>88</sup> Some of these issues are considered in a forthcoming monograph on the textual tradition of the works ascribed to Abū Qurrah in Greek and Georgian and their relation to the corpus of his writings preserved in Arabic.